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### **Book Review**

Russell, Ronald. *The Journey of Robert Monroe: From Out-of-Body Explorer to Consciousness Pioneer*. Charlottesville, Va.: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2007. xxviii + 376 pp.

*Reviewed by Matthew Fike, PhD*

If one were going to read only a single book on the life and work of Robert A. Monroe (1915–1995), an excellent choice would be Ronald Russell's new biography, which provides a stronger, more comprehensive synthesis than Bayard Stockton's *Catapult: The Biography of Robert A. Monroe* (Donning, 1989). Russell begins with the coming of William Munro to the United States in 1651 and concludes with the promotion of Skip Atwater to the presidency of The Monroe Institute® in January 2007. The book's thesis is that Monroe's life is a hero's journey, in Joseph Campbell's sense, because he had adventures both in the physical world and in inner space, bringing back from the latter a message that benefits humanity in the form of Hemi-Sync®, TMI's residential courses, and his three books.

Russell takes the reader in just two brisk chapters from Monroe's boyhood in Lexington, Kentucky, to his marriage in 1971 to Nancy Penn Honeycutt (his fourth wife, to whom he would be married for twenty-three years). The rest of the book focuses on his personal experience of OBE, scientific investigation of consciousness in his own lab, the development of Hemi-Sync and TMI, and his growing popularity as a speaker and research subject. There are chapters on his out-of-body exploration as described in each of his books and on major segments and themes in his life. Charles T. Tart's thoughtful Foreword and an Appendix containing Skip Atwater's article on the Hemi-Sync process frame the book.

Monroe's early adventures in the physical world, especially flying, conditioned him to deal with fear, while his creative activities, especially music and writing, cultivated his imagination. He gained a left-brain practicality from his father and a right-brain sense of adventure and a fascination with the unknown from his mother. There was no heavy religious indoctrination in the Monroe household, but the influence of his father may be more profound in one area than Russell realizes. The obvious connection between the elder Monroe's 370-acre farm outside Columbus, Ohio, and his son's experiment with 800 acres of New Land in rural Virginia is left unexplored.

In 1958 Monroe had his first OBE, precipitated perhaps by sleep-learning experiments, an energy beam that caused vibrations, or (in Stockton but not Russell) the pyramid-shaped copper roof of his home. His experiences involved the physical world, the nonphysical world, an alternate universe, and past lifetimes (reincarnation is one of the main principles of his cosmology). Along the way, there were major turning points and discoveries such as giving

over his OBEs to his Higher Self, realizing that the music and colors in his extra-terrestrial “Home” were on a feedback loop, and ceasing his OB activity after the death of Nancy because of the powerful emotion involved in encountering her in a nonphysical state. Monroe’s most important milestone was the realization in *Ultimate Journey* of the “Known Basic,” which is that we are co-creators with a mysterious and indifferent essence that is definitely not the God of Sunday school lessons.

Russell emphasizes the crucial role of Nancy Penn in supporting Monroe’s exploration of the OB state and his development of the Institute, as well as the “incalculable” contribution of her daughter, Nancy “Scooter” Honeycutt (later McMoneagle), to the latter. Without the two of them, Russell suggests, Monroe “lost contact with the realities, and also the limitations, of the audio technology he had created.” The reader may notice this statement’s resonance with Murray Cox’s 1993 Omni article, quoted two pages earlier, which associates Monroe with Don Quixote for “telling us there’s more to reality than what we see or touch.” The analogy is disputable—Monroe’s exploration of dimensions beyond the physical world is not analogous to Quixote’s distortion of everyday reality. More to the point, an infected imagination overcomes both the man and the literary character in the absence of a grounding feminine influence. In any case, Russell is forthright about Monroe’s shortcomings in other areas as well—he could be difficult to work for, moody, and controlling. That his time in charge of the Institute clearly outlived his ability to administrate effectively points to a pervasive irony that Russell overlooks. If “thoughts are things,” then Monroe’s “predator theory” of human nature may partly account for the predators he encountered in his business dealings.

To our knowledge of Monroe’s life, the book contributes, for example, a heart-warming anecdote about daughter Laurie’s visit to a psychic; detail on George Durette (Monroe’s close friend and farm manager); facts on the binaural beat’s discovery in 1839 (Monroe did not discover it but realized its potential and patented three related applications); a good explication of Miranon’s revelation of the forty-nine focus levels; and a moving account of Monroe’s death. But the author devotes only one sentence to Monroe’s dare-devil flight in dense cloud cover through the mountains of Ecuador (a highlight of *Catapult*), downplays the “earth changes” that loom large in Stockton’s account, and completely omits the earlier biography’s lovely detail about photographs that reportedly show how “shafts of light emanate from the excavation” for TMI’s residential center. In due course, Russell does note that Monroe’s “Inspec” (short for “Intelligent Species”) is “a part of himself” (more precisely, it is his afterlife self); but the author overlooks the strong implication that “AA,” a character from *Far Journeys* and *Ultimate Journey* who is associated with a pyramid-shaped roof, is Monroe himself.

The reader, however, will be grateful for Russell’s restraint in applying labels (former TMI business manager Ron Harris’s phrase “a true renaissance man” best sums up Monroe’s remarkable life) and for the ample references to consciousness investigation and other traditions. Russell is fully fluent in the relevant literature. Near the end of the book, he invokes

William Blake's lines about seeing earth and heaven in small things, but another passage from Blake might be a more fitting tribute to a hero of consciousness exploration, who believed that the greatest illusion is that human beings have limitations. Blake writes of supra-consciousness, "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite." As Russell makes clear in his fine biography, the world is indebted to Robert Monroe for leading the way toward such expanded perception.

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